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# HEIDEGGER'S HIDDEN PATH: FROM PHILOSOPHY TO POLITICS

W. J. KORAB-KARPOWICZ

MARTIN HEIDEGGER IS WIDELY ACKNOWLEDGED to be one of the most original and important philosophers of the twentieth century, while remaining one of the most controversial. His thinking has contributed to such diverse fields as phenomenology, existentialism, hermeneutics, aesthetics, literary criticism, and theology. His critique of traditional metaphysics and his opposition to positivism and technological world domination have been embraced by leading theorists of post-modernity. He influenced such prominent thinkers as Gadamer, Arendt, Habermas, Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, his involvement in the Nazi movement has invoked a stormy debate. Although he never claimed that his philosophy was concerned with politics, political considerations have come to overshadow his philosophical work. Especially after the publication of Victor Farias's *Heidegger et le Nazisme* in 1987 and Hugo Ott's *Martin Heidegger: Unterwegs zu einer Biographie* in 1988, it becomes difficult to treat Heidegger's political stance as irrelevant to his philosophical opus.<sup>2</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> See Fred Dallmayr, *Life-world, Modernity, and Critique: Paths between Heidegger and the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> See Victor Farias, *Heidegger et le nazisme* (Paris: Verdier, 1987), and for the English edition, *Heidegger and Nazism*, ed. Joseph Margolis and Tom Rockmore, trans. Paul Burrell and Gabriel R. Ricci (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989). See also, Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger: Unterwegs zu einer Biographie* (Frankfurt-Main: Campus, 1988), and for the English translation, *Martin Heidegger: A Political Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1993). Related works include among others *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Wollin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); Julian Young, *Heidegger, Philosophy, Nazism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Fred Dallmayr, *The Other Heidegger* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); and Thomas Sheehan, "Reading a Life: Heidegger and Hard Times," *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 70–96.

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the first edition, published in 1963, of his comprehensive and detailed study of the development of Heidegger's thought, *Der Denkweg Martin Heideggers* (*Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking*), Otto Pöggeler did not raise any political issues. Yet, in light of the controversy that gained a new momentum in the late 1980's such an approach seems no longer possible.<sup>3</sup> The distinction between "two Heideggers"—one a philosopher and one a politician—is no longer tenable.<sup>4</sup> Questions must be raised concerning Heidegger's philosophy and his political involvement, and vice versa.

One serious defect of the polemical writings that straightforwardly charge Heidegger with Nazism is that they mostly represent a poor knowledge of his philosophy. Heidegger's writings are painfully difficult, even to specialists, and his concepts can be easily misinterpreted, especially by those who, instead of searching for truth, embrace a prosecutor's zeal. For example, in his influential book, Farias completely avoids asking philosophical questions. His work, as many commentators agree, is "a jumble of truths, half-truths, insinuations, and innuendos—all presented with the same conviction and endowed with the same unquestioned authority."<sup>5</sup> On the internet, one can easily find hundreds of articles by authors who claim that Heidegger's guilt has already been decided. My objective is not to blame or to exonerate Heidegger before investigating the relationship between his philosophy and politics in depth. Obviously, given the limited nature of my presentation, I cannot consider Heidegger's entire philosophical opus. I intend to concentrate chiefly on his critique of the Western metaphysical tradition and on an interpretation of his most controversial statement from *An Introduction to Metaphysics* about the "inner truth and greatness" of National Socialism.<sup>6</sup> I will begin my investigation by considering a notorious episode in Heidegger's life, namely his

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<sup>3</sup> In the second edition of his study, published in 1983, Pöggeler included some observations about Heidegger's politics. This edition has become the basis of the English translation. See Otto Pöggeler, *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking* (Atlantic Heights, NJ: Humanities Press, 1987), 271–83.

<sup>4</sup> Dallmayr, *The Other Heidegger*, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 166.

service as Rector of the University of Freiburg from April 1933 to February 1934. Then I move to the essence of his philosophy, the quest for the meaning of Being, deduce a political theory from his ontology, and arrive at his politics. This way I attempt to throw some new light on the Heidegger controversy and to disclose the Heideggerian hidden path.

# I

*The Controversial Stage in Heidegger's Life.* Heidegger's life entered a problematic and controversial stage with Hitler's rise to power. In September 1930, Adolf Hitler's National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) became the second largest party in Germany, and on January 30, 1933 Hitler was appointed chancellor of Germany. Up to then virtually apolitical, Heidegger now became politically involved. On April 21, 1933, he was elected rector of the University of Freiburg by the faculty. He was apparently urged by his colleagues to become a candidate for this politically sensitive post, as he later claimed in an interview with *Der Spiegel*, to avoid the danger that a party functionary would be named rector.<sup>7</sup> But he also seemed to believe that he could steer the Nazi movement in the right direction.<sup>8</sup> On May 3, 1933, he joined the NSDAP, or Nazi, party.<sup>9</sup> On May 27, 1933, he delivered his inaugural rectoral address on "The Self-Assertion of the German University."<sup>10</sup> The ambiguous text of this speech has often

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<sup>7</sup> See Martin Heidegger, "Spiegel Interview with Martin Heidegger," *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism*, ed. Günter Neske and Emil Kettering, trans. Lisa Harries and Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Paragon House, 1990). Although the interview took place on September 23, 1966, it was only published after his death, ten years later.

<sup>8</sup> See Pöggeler, 275; Dallmayr, *The Other Heidegger*, 25.

<sup>9</sup> Heidegger entered the Nazi party, as he wrote in 1945 in a letter to the de-Nazification commission at Freiburg University in 1945, in order to facilitate his relations with the Ministry of Education and Culture and "to attempt from within National Socialism, while having a point a reference to it, to bring a spiritual change in its development." Heidegger's letter is quoted in Karl A. Moehling, "Heidegger and the Nazis," *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker*, ed. Thomas Sheehan (Chicago: Precedent, 1981), 31–43.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University," *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism*.

been interpreted as an expression of his support for Hitler's regime.<sup>11</sup> During his tenure as rector he produced a number of speeches in the Nazi cause, such as, for example, "Declaration of Support for Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist State" delivered in November 1933.<sup>12</sup> There is little doubt that during that time, Heidegger placed the great prestige of his scholarly reputation at the service of National Socialism, and thus, willingly or not, contributed to its legitimization among his fellow Germans.<sup>13</sup>

And yet, just one year later, on April 23, 1934, Heidegger resigned from his office and took no further part in politics.<sup>14</sup> His rectoral address was found incompatible with the party line, and its text was

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<sup>11</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts," *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism*. In this text Heidegger attempts to show that his rectoral address, although often misunderstood, was meant to stress the self-determination of the university against external political pressure. He also claims that in his capacity as rector, resisting pressure imposed on him, he prohibited the hanging of an anti-Jewish poster, which was a part of the campaign "against the un-German spirit" directed by Nazi minister of propaganda Joseph Goebbels, appointed deans who were not party members, and prevented a book burning by Nazi students.

<sup>12</sup> A good selection of these speeches can be found in *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Wolin (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 40–60.

<sup>13</sup> That Heidegger placed his reputation in the service of National Socialism, and thus allowed it to be used by the Nazis as a propaganda tool, was the main charge made against him made by the de-Nazification commission at Freiburg University, which led to his ban from teaching in 1946. There are, however, witnesses who speak favorably about Heidegger's behavior. See Hans L. Gottschalk, "Heidegger as Rector," *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism*, 169–73. Gottschalk, a Jewish scholar who in 1938 emigrated to the United Kingdom, relates that among other things, Heidegger tried to prevent anti-Semitic violence by the Nazi students and in the longer run proved to be unacceptable to the National Socialists as Rector.

<sup>14</sup> In February 1934 Heidegger was asked to dismiss Willhelm von Möllendorf, dean of the Faculty of Medicine and former rector, and Erik Wolf, dean of the Faculty of Law, and to replace them with faculty members more acceptable to the Nazi party. Heidegger refused, and offered to resign, in the case that the Ministry should insist on this request. Since the Ministry continued to put pressure on him, at the end of the winter semester 1933/4, he resigned. He then refused to attend the ceremonial handing over of the rectorate to the successor appointed by the Ministry, who was called by the press "the first National Socialist rector of the university." See Heidegger, "The Rectorate 1933/34" and "Spiegel Interview." Heidegger's resignation can be related to the fact that by that time Heidegger was already disillusioned about the nature of National Socialism. Due to the rapid politicization of German society, the solidification of Nazi ideology into racism, and the growing atmosphere of terror, all Heidegger's hopes for a "spiritual change" in the development of Nazism from "within" must have been gone.

eventually banned by the Nazis.<sup>15</sup> Because he was no longer involved in the party's activities, Heidegger's membership in the NSDAP became a mere formality. Certain restrictions were put on his freedom to publish and attend conferences.<sup>16</sup> In his lecture courses of the late 1930s and early 1940s, and especially in the course entitled *Hölderlin's Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein"* (Hölderlin's Hymns "Germania" and "The Rhine") originally presented at the University of Freiburg during the winter semester of 1934/35, he expressed covert criticism of Nazi ideology.<sup>17</sup> He came under attack of Ernst Krieck, semi-official Nazi philosopher.<sup>18</sup> For some time he was under the surveillance of the Gestapo. His final humiliation came in 1944, when he was declared the most "expendable" member of the faculty and sent to the Rhine to dig trenches. Following Germany's defeat in the Second World War, Heidegger was accused of Nazi sympathies. He was forbidden to teach and in 1946 was dismissed from his chair of philosophy. The ban was lifted in 1949.

## II

*The Quest for the Meaning of Being.* Throughout his long life, Heidegger was preoccupied with the question of the meaning of Being.<sup>19</sup> His first formulation of this question goes as far back as his high school studies, during which he read Franz Brentano's book *On the Manifold Meaning of Being in Aristotle*. In 1907, the seventeen-year-old Heidegger asked: "If what-is is predicated in manifold meanings, then what is its leading fundamental meaning? What does Being mean?"<sup>20</sup> The question of Being, unanswered at that time, becomes

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<sup>15</sup> Heidegger's inaugural rectoral address bore no trace of the racism that sustained Nazism, nor of anti-Semitism. See Parvis Emad, "Elements of an Intellectual Portrait in H. W. Petzel's Memoirs," in Heinrich Wiegand Petzel, *Encounters and Dialogues with Martin Heidegger (1929–1976)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), xxii.

<sup>16</sup> See "The Rectorate 1933/34," 30–2.

<sup>17</sup> For an analysis of Heidegger's covert criticism of National Socialism see Fred Dallmayr, "Heidegger, Hölderlin, and Politics" in *The Other Heidegger*, 132–48.

<sup>18</sup> Young, 2.

<sup>19</sup> When Heidegger says Being (*Sein*), he does not refer to what is traditionally understood as Being, namely to what is in general or to reality, but rather to the being of something.

<sup>20</sup> Heidegger, "My Way to Phenomenology," 74.

the leading question of *Being and Time* twenty years later.<sup>21</sup> In accordance with the method of philosophy which he employs in his fundamental treatise, before attempting to provide an answer to the question of Being in general, Heidegger sets out to answer the question of the Being of the particular kind of entity that is the human being, which he calls *Dasein*. The vivid phenomenological descriptions of *Dasein*'s being-in-the-world, especially *Dasein*'s everydayness and resoluteness toward death, have attracted many readers with interests related to existential philosophy, theology, and literature. The basic concepts such as temporality, understanding, historicity, repetition, and authentic or inauthentic existence were carried over into and further explored in his later works. Still, from the point of view of the quest for the meaning of Being, *Being and Time* was a failure and remained unfinished.<sup>22</sup> As Heidegger himself admitted in his later essay, "Letter on Humanism" (1946), the third division of its first part, entitled "Time and Being," was held back "because thinking failed in adequate saying of *the turning* and did not succeed with the help of the language of metaphysics."<sup>23</sup> The second part also remained unwritten.

"The turn" (*Kehre*) that occurs in the 1930's is the change in Heidegger's thinking mentioned above. The consequence of "the turn" is not the abandoning of the leading question of *Being and Time*. Heidegger stresses the continuity of his thought over the

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<sup>21</sup> *Sein und Zeit* (Being and Time) originally appeared in 1927 in the *Jahrbuch für phänomenologische Forschung* edited by Edmund Husserl. It was then published by Max Niemeyer Verlag. Its seventh edition was first translated into English by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson and in 1962 published by Basil Blackwell.

<sup>22</sup> In the "Preface to the Seventh German Edition" of *Being and Time*, published in 1953, Heidegger writes: "While the previous editions have borne the designation 'First Half,' this has now been deleted. After a quarter of a century, the second half could no longer be added unless the first were to be presented anew. Yet, the road it has taken remains even today a necessary one, if our *Dasein* is to be stirred by the question of Being. For the elucidation of this question, the reader may refer to my *Einführung in die Metaphysik*." This remark indicates the importance of the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, the work which Heidegger singles out from among many as being the heir of *Being and Time*, his fundamental work. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 19.

<sup>23</sup> Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 250.

course of the change. Nevertheless, the question of the meaning of Being is reformulated in Heidegger's later work. It becomes a question of the openness, that is, of the truth, of Being.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, since the openness of Being refers to a situation within history, the most important concept in the later Heidegger becomes the history of Being.<sup>25</sup>

The lecture course, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, was originally presented at the University of Freiburg in the summer semester of 1935, and can be seen as a bridge between the earlier and the later Heidegger.<sup>26</sup> The fact that Heidegger acknowledges at the point of departure of his inquiry in the *Introduction to Metaphysics* is that for us Being has become little more than an empty word with an evanescent meaning.<sup>27</sup> This is, in his view, where we now stand. It is the fundamental phenomenon of the forgetfulness of Being that is characteristic of modernity. But what if, Heidegger asks, Being is both the most obscure and the most complex concept? What if this concept is the one most worthy of being questioned? He believes that in fact the Being of beings has been a prominent theme of philosophy, and yet after the great beginnings of Western thought in ancient Greece, attempts

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<sup>24</sup> Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth," *Pathmarks*, 154.

<sup>25</sup> For a reader unacquainted with the Heidegger's thought, both the "question of the meaning of Being" and the expression "history of Being" may sound strange. In the first place, such a reader can argue that when something is said to be, there is nothing expressed that the word "Being" could properly denote. Therefore, the word "Being" is a meaningless term, and the Heideggerian quest for the meaning of Being is, in general, a misunderstanding. Secondly, our reader could also think that the Being of Heidegger would be no more likely to have a history than the Being of Aristotle. Hence, the "history of Being" is a misunderstanding as well. Yet Heidegger's task is precisely to show that there is in fact a meaningful concept of Being. "We understand the 'is' we use in speaking," he claims, "although we do not comprehend it conceptually." If the Being whose meaning Heidegger seeks seems so elusive, almost like no-thing, it is because it is not an entity. It is not something; it is not a being. "Being is essentially different from a being, from beings." The "ontological difference," the distinction between Being (*das Sein*) and beings (*das Seiende*), is fundamental for Heidegger. The forgetfulness of Being that, according to him, occurs in the course of Western philosophy amounts to the oblivion of this distinction.

<sup>26</sup> Heidegger's lecture course *Einführung in die Metaphysik* was first published by Max Niemeyer Verlag in 1953. Its first English translation, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* by Ralph Manheim, was published in 1959 by the Yale University Press.

<sup>27</sup> Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 42.



to think of Being precisely as Being failed over and over again.<sup>28</sup> The history of Being can then be described as a gradual falling away from the primordial experience of Being itself which occurred in early Greek thought.<sup>29</sup> The question of Being would still provide a stimulus to the researches of Plato and Aristotle, but it was precisely with them that this primordial experience of Being was covered over. This fateful event was followed by the gradual slipping away of the difference between Being and beings. Called variously by different philosophers, Being was reduced to a being: *idea*, *energeia*, *substantia*, *actualitas*, objectivity, absolute concept, or will to power.<sup>30</sup>

### III

*Overcoming Metaphysics.* For the later Heidegger, “Western philosophy,” in which there occurs forgetfulness of Being, is synonymous with “the tradition of metaphysics.” Metaphysics inquires about the Being of beings, but in such a way that the question of Being as such is disregarded, and Being itself is obliterated.<sup>31</sup> The Heideggerian “history of Being” can thus be regarded as the history of metaphysics, which is the history of Being’s oblivion. However, looked at from another angle, metaphysics is also the way of thinking that looks beyond beings toward their ground or basis. Each metaphysics seeks the *fun-*

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<sup>28</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 12–4.

<sup>29</sup> In Chapter 4 of the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger discusses four distinctions: Being and becoming, Being and appearance, Being and thinking, Being and the ought. He attempts to show that in reference to the primordial Greek experience of Being, “Being” is not just an empty word, but can be considered to designate endurance, identity, presence, and laying before.

<sup>30</sup> Although explicitly mentioned at the end of Chapter 3, Heidegger’s conception of the history of Being is only foreshadowed in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*.

<sup>31</sup> In fact, in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger implies that the term “metaphysics” is ambiguous. In reference to its etymological meaning, *meta ta phusika* is an inquiry that goes beyond beings and deals with Being. But in fact, Heidegger claims, Being as such remains concealed to metaphysics as it developed in the philosophical tradition of the West, and was thus forgotten. See chapter 1.

*damentum absolutum*, the indisputable ground of what-is.<sup>32</sup> In Descartes, for example, this ground is attained through the “*Cogito*” argument.<sup>33</sup> The Cartesian metaphysics is characterized by subjectivity, because it has its ground in the self-certain subject. Furthermore, metaphysics is not merely the philosophy which asks the question of the Being of beings. At the end of philosophy, that is, in our present age, where philosophy dissolves into particular sciences, the sciences still speak of the Being of what-is as a whole.<sup>34</sup> In the wider sense of this term, metaphysics is thus, for Heidegger, any discipline which, whether explicitly or not, provides an answer to the question of the Being of beings and of their ground. In medieval times such a discipline was scholastic philosophy, which defined beings as *entia creatum* (created things) and provided them with their ground in *ens perfectissimum* (the perfect being), God. Today, it is modern technology, through which the contemporary human being establishes himself in the world by working with it in the various modes of making and shaping.<sup>35</sup> Technology forms and controls the human position in today's world. It masters and dominates beings in various ways.

“In distinction from mastering beings, the thinking of thinkers is the thinking of Being.”<sup>36</sup> Heidegger believes that early Greek thinking was not yet metaphysics. Presocratic thinkers asked the question concerning the Being of beings, but did so in such a way that Being itself was laid open. They experienced the Being of beings as the presencing (presence) of what is present. Being as presencing means enduring in unconcealment, disclosing. Heidegger uses various

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<sup>32</sup> Heidegger explores this issue particularly in his essay “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,” in *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

<sup>33</sup> The *Cogito* argument (Latin *cogito*, “I think”) is an argument employed by Descartes. Descartes’ *Cogito ergo sum* (“I think therefore I exist”) is an attempt to establish the existence of the self in any act of thinking, including the act of doubting.

<sup>34</sup> The modern sciences and technology, Heidegger claims, may try to conceal or deny their metaphysical origin, but they cannot dispense with it.

<sup>35</sup> See Martin Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture,” *The Question Regarding Technology and Other Essays* (New York, Harper & Row, 1977), 126.

<sup>36</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1982), 10.

descriptions in seeking to convey rightly the early Greek experience. What-is, what is present, the unconcealed, is “what appears from out of itself, in appearing shows itself, and in this self-showing manifests.”<sup>37</sup> It is the “emerging arising, the unfolding that lingers.”<sup>38</sup> He describes this experience with the Greek words *phusis* (emerging dominance) and *alêtheia* (unconcealment). He attempts to show that the early Greeks did not “objectify” beings (they did not try to reduce them to an object for the thinking subject), but they let them be as they were, as self-showing rising into unconcealment. They experienced the phenomenality of what is present, its radiant self-showing.

The departure of Western philosophical tradition from concern with what is present in presencing, from this unique experience that astonished the Greeks, has profound theoretical and practical consequences. It results in metaphysics. According to Heidegger, today’s metaphysics, in the form of technology and the calculative thinking related to it, has become so pervasive that there is no realm of life that is not subject to its dominance. It imposes its technological-scientific-industrial character on human beings, making it the sole criterion of the human sojourn on earth.<sup>39</sup> As it ultimately degenerates into ideologies and world-views, metaphysics provides an answer to the question of the Being of beings for contemporary men and women, but skillfully removes from their lives the problem of their own existence. Moreover, because its sway over contemporary human beings is so powerful, metaphysics cannot be simply cast aside or rejected. Any direct attempt to do so will only strengthen its hold. Metaphysics cannot be rejected, canceled or denied, but it can be overcome by demonstrating its nihilism. In Heidegger’s use of the term, “nihilism” has a very specific meaning: it refers to the forgetfulness of Being.<sup>40</sup> What remains unquestioned and forgotten in metaphysics is Being; hence, it is nihilistic.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 202–3.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>39</sup> Enmeshed in a technological and ideological framework, human beings become enframed in it. See Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*.

<sup>40</sup> In *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 169, Heidegger says: “To forget about Being and merely to chase after beings—that is nihilism.” Since Being as such remains forgotten in it, metaphysics is for him nihilistic by definition and the metaphysics of Plato is no less nihilistic than the metaphysics of Nietzsche. For the discussion of Plato’s and Nietzsche’s nihilism, see Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Neske, 1989).

According to Heidegger, Western humankind in all its relations with beings is sustained by metaphysics. Every age, every human epoch, no matter however different they may be—Greece after the Presocratics, Rome, the Middle Ages, modernity—has asserted a metaphysics and, therefore, is placed in a specific relationship to what-is as a whole. Metaphysics inquires about the Being of beings, but it reduces Being to a being; it does not think Being as Being. Insofar as Being itself is obliterated in it, metaphysics is nihilism. Heidegger attempts to demonstrate the nihilism of metaphysics in his account of the history of Being, which he sees as the history of Being's oblivion. His attempt to overcome metaphysics is not based on a common-sense positing of a different set of values or the setting out of an alternative world-view, but rather is related to his concept of history, the central theme of which is the repetition of the possibilities for existence. This means thinking Being back to the primordial beginning of the West—to the early Greek experience of Being—and repeating this beginning, so that the Western world can begin anew.

An important aim of the later Heidegger is to recapture and repeat the original experience of the Being of beings that takes place at the beginning of Western thought. But the repetition of this experience is not for the sake of the Presocratics themselves. Heidegger's work is not a mere antiquarian, scholarly study of early Greek thinking, nor an affirmation of the long-lost Greek way of life. His project is set within the perspective of nihilism and Being's forgetfulness, both unknown to the Greeks, and has as a goal the future possibilities for human existence. It occurs as a listening that opens itself to the words of the Presocratics from our contemporary age, from the age of the world-picture and representation that is characterized by technological and ideological domination, and the oblivion of Being. In the beginning of philosophy, the task of the Greeks was to ask the question "What are beings?" and hence to bring beings as such and as a whole to their first and simplest interpretation. In the end, the task is to bring into question what has been forgotten in a long tradition of metaphysics, and consequently to bring the Western world to a new beginning. The new beginning thus begins with the question of Being.

#### IV

*From Ontology to a Political Theory.* In Heidegger's sense, "ontology" is an inquiry in which the question of Being is raised.

Fundamental ontology is the philosophy that Heidegger develops in *Being and Time*. In his major treatise, Heidegger does not explicitly raise any issues that might suggest any direct link of this work to a political theory. *Being and Time* remains at first sight apolitical.<sup>41</sup> This cannot, however, be said of his works following “the turn,” in which Heidegger departs from his fundamental ontology. Especially in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, we find many statements that have either direct or indirect political bearing. Does any political philosophy emerge from the later Heidegger? Reproached once by Karl Löwith for his alleged involvement in Nazi politics, Heidegger said in his own defense that Löwith, as his former student, should have known that his thinking had long since left behind the “metaphysics of subjectivity.”<sup>42</sup> What, then, has the metaphysics of subjectivity to do with a political stand?

For Heidegger, the metaphysics of subjectivity develops with Descartes and is synonymous with modernity. In the Cartesian philosophy, metaphysics finds its indisputable ground in the self-certain subject.<sup>43</sup> As that which is present for itself, the subject gives to beings their actual presence as objects. It serves as the measure of all things and the ground of all truth. Accordingly, the world becomes matter to be arranged and conquered. Heidegger perceives the ultimate expression of modernity in the drive for domination—in the will that wants to control everything. If the first great modern thinker is for him Descartes, the last one is Nietzsche. Nietzsche’s concept of the will to power, the struggle for world domination, is exemplified in modern global ideologies, and especially in the three ideologies which

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<sup>41</sup> For an attempt to see political themes in *Being and Time*, see Mark Blitz, *Heidegger’s Being and Time and the Possibility of Political Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981). Various attempts have been made to link *Being and Time* to Heidegger’s politics. For a critical assessment of these attempts, see Julian Young, *Heidegger, Philosophy, Nazism*, chapters 2 and 3. Young says: “a great variety of political commitments can be persuasively argued for within the framework provided by *Being and Time*’s conception of authentic historicity” (73). He argues that historicity, authenticity, resoluteness, and other basic concepts of Heidegger’s fundamental work cannot be linked to fascism or to any other particular political perspective.

<sup>42</sup> See Emad, “Elements of an Intellectual Portrait in H. W. Petzel’s Memoirs,” xiv.

<sup>43</sup> See the discussion of Descartes in “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking.”

Heidegger either mentions by name or alludes to: Americanism (positivism), Communism, and Nazism.<sup>44</sup> Although there are certainly differences between them, differences that make them struggle against each other, from a metaphysical point of view, as Heidegger plainly states, they are all the same.<sup>45</sup> They all stand on the basis of both the metaphysics of subjectivity and the forgetfulness of Being. All of them are characterized by the will to control, which relies on the use of technology and leads to the absorption of the individual into a mass. Americanism, which is seen by Heidegger not as democracy or liberalism but rather as a form of positivism, subjects the individual to technological planning and quantitative research techniques; Communism, to the collective organization of production; and Nazism, to a racially-based organizational control.<sup>46</sup>

What is most destructive in ideologies is not only that by means of intellect falsified into a mere cleverness they devastate the earth, but also that by removing the question of Being from their horizon they dehumanize and uproot human beings.<sup>47</sup> As Heidegger tells us in his lecture courses on Nietzsche offered in 1940, the Nietzschean will to power ultimately leads human beings to be reduced to the level of beasts. Heidegger rejects any forms of collectivism, in which, by forsaking reflection on their existence, human beings surrender themselves to something "greater" than themselves. Therefore, if there is any political theory implied in his writings, it is certainly not one that can be associated with fascism or Nazism.<sup>48</sup> In his thought, he guides us to look upon politics without the mediation of the prism of modern

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<sup>44</sup> These ideologies have also been described as "positivism, Marxism, and fascism." See Dallmayr, *The Other Heidegger*, 28.

<sup>45</sup> Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 31 and 37.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 38–9.

<sup>47</sup> To dehumanize is to obstruct the question of Being. For Heidegger, "humanism" means "that the essence of the human being is essential for the truth of Being," and understood in this sense, his humanism contradicts all other kinds of humanism, which he regards as metaphysical. See "Letter on Humanism," 262–3.

<sup>48</sup> Heidegger's philosophical writings "can actually be read an indictment of Nazism to the extent that the latter aimed at the imperial domination of the world based on racial-biological grounds." See Dallmayr, *The Other Heidegger*, 125.

political ideologies. Rather than advocating any form of modern state, he returns to the notion of *polis*, which he refuses to identify with state or city-state, but translates as *die Stätte*, the place, the site of historical human dwelling among beings.<sup>49</sup> Opposing the process of globalization and “purely technological” relationships by which all relations to nature are destroyed, he states that “everything essential and great has only emerged when human beings had a home and were rooted in the tradition.”<sup>50</sup> He urges us to ask the essential question of Being first and then only from this perspective to look for political solutions. As a powerful critic of modernity, who denies both the idea of progress and the idea of perfection related to it, he lays foundations for post-modernism.<sup>51</sup>

## V

*From Theory to Politics.* If, for Heidegger, Nazism is a nihilistic and dehumanizing ideology based in the metaphysics of subjectivity, a modern ideology with which his thought cannot be identified, how should we then understand his most controversial statement from the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, about the “inner truth and greatness” of National Socialism?<sup>52</sup> First, this statement, made during a lecture delivered in 1935, can be regarded as ironic and as an expression of

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<sup>49</sup> Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 128.

<sup>50</sup> Heidegger, “*Spiegel* Interview,” 56.

<sup>51</sup> For its adherents, modernity is a path of progress, culminating in the perfection of humanity. Post-modernism denies the idea of progress and rejects the notion that the purported end of modernity is the perfection of humanity. History lacks teleology and evolution. Modernity is thus not a model to follow; it is arbitrary. See John A. Vasquez, “The Post-Positivist Debate: Reconstructing Scientific Enquiry and International Relations after the Enlightenment’s Fall,” *International Relations Theory Today*, ed. Ken Booth and Steve Smith (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 219.

<sup>52</sup> The full statement in my translation reads: “Particularly, what is now generally regarded as the philosophy of National Socialism, but which has nothing to do with the inner truth and greatness of this movement (namely, the encounter between global technology and modern humanity), is fishing in these troubled waters of ‘values’ and ‘totalities.’” See Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 166.

Heidegger's growing disappointment with actual National Socialism. To assess it properly, we have to consider the context in which it was made. In the context of a totalitarian state, where attitudes of loyalty to the ideology and hostility to its opponents are imposed in a particularly intensive fashion, even a slight criticism of the regime can be subjected to severe punishment. On the other hand, in such a context, any critical allusion or covert criticism becomes transparent to those who keep their ears open. It would then be immediately clear to the attentive audience of Heidegger's lecture that the "inner truth and greatness" of National Socialism did not imply its outward truth and real greatness. They would regard this statement not as a support of the actual Nazi movement but rather as a criticism of it.<sup>53</sup> However, if we add to this statement the passage printed in parentheses, "namely, the encounter between global technology and modern humanity" (which was, according to Heidegger's testimony, not actually uttered during the lecture, but already present in the lecture notes), then an additional interpretation is needed.<sup>54</sup> In what sense was National Socialism for him related to "the encounter between global technology and modern humanity"?

The essence of technology lies in enframing.<sup>55</sup> By enframing, technology puts humanity in its "frame" (*Ge-stell*). Human beings become framed and challenged by the power that manifests itself as the essence of technology and that they no longer can control. Yet National Socialism, as Heidegger says as late as 1966 in the interview with *Der Spiegel*, moved in the direction of achieving "an adequate relationship to the essence of technology."<sup>56</sup> This and additional statements from that interview give us a clue as to how fully to understand

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<sup>53</sup> In a letter that Heidegger wrote in 1968 as a clarification of the statement, he says: "The listeners who understood this lecture, therefore, also grasped how the sentence was to be understood. Only the party informers who, as I knew, sat in my courses, understood it otherwise, as they well should have." See Pöggeler, *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking*, 277.

<sup>54</sup> Heidegger says: "The reason I did not read that passage aloud was because I was convinced that my audience would understand me correctly." See Heidegger, "*Spiegel* Interview," 54.

<sup>55</sup> Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 26.

<sup>56</sup> Heidegger, "*Spiegel* Interview," 61.



his 1935 statement about the “inner truth and greatness” of National Socialism. Heidegger implies that National Socialism moved in the direction of “age-old traditions” of thought, and that those, once awakened, could assist human beings in making possible “a free relationship (that is, not based on enframing) to the technological world.”<sup>57</sup> It moved in that direction initially, but did not go very far, because “those people (that is, the Nazi leaders) were much too limited in their thinking to gain a really explicit relationship to what is happening to-day and what has been under way for three centuries.”<sup>58</sup>

What follows from these statements is that Heidegger initially associated National Socialism with a movement that would bring Germany back to its “age-old traditions,” renew its spiritual strength, and take it away from the heritage of modernity that has been developing since the seventeenth century.<sup>59</sup> Bringing Germany back to its ancient traditions constituted for him the “inner truth and greatness” of this movement.<sup>60</sup> He saw in it an antidote against modernism. However,

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> “To justify their political system, the Nazis were willing to reach deep into the German past and to appropriate as much as they could. They would go to ancient times to conjure up idealistic pictures of German valor, purity, and virtue, of tribes loyally attached to their leaders, of heroic, ruthless warriors.” Hans Sluga, *Heidegger's Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 30.

<sup>60</sup> There is still another interpretation possible, namely, that of Christian E. Lewalter, who in the prestigious weekly *Die Zeit* claimed that Heidegger understood the National Socialist movement as “a symptom of the tragic collision of technology and man” and only believed that “as such a symptom” it had a “greatness.” See Karsten Harries’s “Introduction” to *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism*, xvii. Heidegger, who in a letter to the editor endorsed Lewalter’s interpretation himself, seems to repeat it again during his *Spiegel* interview, when, pressed by the interviewer and apparently confused, he admits that the same greatness can be assigned to the Communist movement and Americanism. See “*Spiegel* Interview,” 54. However, this admission is not consistent with what he says later in the same interview. Since the Nazis were indeed trying to reach deep into the German past, the interpretation which links the “greatness” with bringing Germany to ancient traditions can be supported not only by the text of the interview, but also by historical research. Also, Otto Pöggeler believed that Heidegger allowed himself to be misled in his later interpretation of the statement and was confused. See Pöggeler, 277.

he was soon disillusioned. Although the Nazis indeed tried to revive German traditions and regarded modernism as a disease, they at the same time engaged in building a totalitarian state and developed an ideology that was philosophically unacceptable to Heidegger.<sup>61</sup> The actual National Socialism, run by people who “were much too limited in their thinking,” and with its political violence and book burning, totalitarian control of the vital resources of the state and the racial composition of the people, and politicization of society and mass rallies, was precisely the ideology which he covertly criticized in his writings, along with Americanism and Communism. And yet, because of his belief in the “inner truth and greatness” of National Socialism, which, as the *Spiegel* interview proves, he cherished to the very end of his life, Heidegger remains politically an ambiguous figure. His statements about suspending moral judgments about violence, at the time of rising terror in Nazi Germany, and his criticism of Christianity, whose roots he traces to Judaism, at the time of the anti-Jewish campaign and the growing political pressure against the Catholic Church, can make one uneasy to say the least.<sup>62</sup> A number of his convictions, which he expresses in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, such as that of Germany being the central nation in Europe and of the crucial role

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<sup>61</sup> After assuming political power, Adolf Hitler intended to create an environment for “healthy” German art, music, and literature. Modernism was defined in biological terms as a disease. The so-called “racial aliens” in art, music, and literature, and especially Jewish writers, were considered carriers of the disease, infecting the German mind and soul. The “Germanic Aryans” were regarded as the only “race” that was the bearer of human culture. The Nazi regime declared all modernist art, music, and literature “degenerate” and made it official policy to rid the nation of these works and their producers. The result was the largest forced emigration of artists, writers, and scholars recorded in history. See Micheal Burleigh and Wolfgang Ippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); see also Ehrhard Bahr and Carolyn See, *Literary Exiles and Refugees in Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: William Andrew Clark, 1998).

<sup>62</sup> See Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Chapter 4, Section 3. A part of Heidegger’s “dream” was a new religion, cleansed of foreign, that is, Jewish and Christian, ingredients. He dreamed about the “new” gods of the Germans. He thus followed the philosopher and Nazi ideologist Herman Schwarz in the latter’s attempt to lay the foundations of “transcendental National Socialism.” See Sluga, *Heidegger’s Crisis*, 108; Pöggeler, *Martin Heidegger’s Path of Thinking*, 273.

of the German language and culture, parallel Nazi beliefs.<sup>63</sup> To the Nazis as well, the German nation and its glorification were the focus of political thinking.

## VI

*What for?—Where to?—and What then?* Heidegger perceives the metaphysical culture of the West as a continuity. It begins with Plato and ends with modernity and the dominance of science and technology. He thus implies in a post-modernist fashion that Nazism and the atom bomb, Auschwitz and Hiroshima, have been something like the “fulfillment” of the tradition of Western metaphysics and tries to distance himself from that tradition.<sup>64</sup> He turns to the Presocratics in order to retrieve a pre-metaphysical mode of thought that would serve as a starting point for a new beginning. However, his grand vision of the essential history of the West and of nihilism (an idea he borrows from Nietzsche<sup>65</sup>) can be questioned. Modernity, which in its

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<sup>63</sup> See Sluga, *Heidegger's Crisis*, 29–52 and 101–24. Sluga convincingly argues that although there was a deep disunity and lack of coherence in the Nazi ideology, which contained both traditional and radical elements, it was profoundly influenced by selective interpretations of Fichte and Nietzsche, thinkers by whom Heidegger was also deeply influenced. From Fichte, the Nazis took the ideas of a crisis that demanded the total reeducation of the German people, of the primordial character of the Germans and their language, of the contrast between what was German and what was un-German, of the unique calling of the Germans and of their affinity with the Greeks. Heidegger's use of such themes as crisis, nation, and leadership, as well as his belief in Germany being the central nation in Europe and in the crucial role of the German language and culture, can be attributed to Fichte. Nietzsche was for the Nazis the philosopher of political heroism, and was regarded as the true philosopher of their ideology and movement. Like Fichte, Nietzsche, and following him Heidegger, believed a crisis had reached Germany, a crisis that was to be resolved only through a rebirth of German culture.

<sup>64</sup> The post-modernists often use the image of the destruction of Hiroshima to show where rationality might lead. See Ken Booth, “Dare not to Know: International Relations Theory versus the Future,” *International Relations Theory Today*, 331. Although Heidegger did not specifically mention Auschwitz and Hiroshima when making critical remarks about modernity, he spoke of gas chambers and of hydrogen bombs. See note 70.

<sup>65</sup> Nietzsche thought of Christianity as decadent and nihilistic, and regarded it as a part of a larger nihilism that had been a fate of the West since Plato. Heidegger owes his conception of nihilism to Nietzsche, but he reworks it in light of his own ontology. See Sluga, *Heidegger's Crisis*, 48–9.

development involves not only a technological but also a social revolution, which sets individuals loose from religious and ethnic communities, from parishes and family bonds, which affirms materialistic values and assigns supremacy to the masses, can be regarded as a radical departure from earlier classical and Christian traditions. Contrary to Heidegger's argument, rather than being a mere continuity, the "essential" history of the West can then be seen as a history of radical transformations. Christianity challenges the classical world while assimilating some aspects of it, and is in turn challenged by modernity. Modernity overturns the ideas and values of the traditional (classical and Christian) culture of the West, and, once it becomes global, leads to the erosion of other traditional cultures.<sup>66</sup>

Under the cover of immense speculative depth and rich ontological vocabulary full of intricate wordplay, which make the reading of his writings so difficult, Heidegger expresses a simple political vision. In spite of its anti-modern edge and post-modern flavor, this vision is modern through and through. Heidegger is a revolutionary thinker who denies the traditional philosophical division between theory and practice, and this is especially clear when he boldly declares that "we have embarked on the great and long venture of demolishing a world that has grown old and of rebuilding it authentically anew."<sup>67</sup> Like other modern political thinkers, he is guided by his abstract ideas, and in the name of those ideas wants to initiate a world revolution. He wants to overturn the traditional culture of the West and build it anew on the basis of earlier traditions in the name of Being. Like other thinkers of modernity, he adopts an Eurocentric perspective and sees the revival of German society as a condition for the revival of Europe (or the West), and that of Europe as a condition for the revival of for the whole world; like them, while rejecting God as an end, he attempts to set up fabricated ends for human beings.<sup>68</sup> Ultimately, in the *Spiegel* interview, he expresses his disillusionment with his philosophical project and says: "Philosophy will not be able to bring about a direct change of the present state of the world. . . . The greatness of what is

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<sup>66</sup> For such an alternative to Heidegger's reading of the history of the West, see Andrew Gamble, *An Introduction to Modern Political Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1981).

<sup>67</sup> *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 106.

<sup>68</sup> Following Nietzsche, Heidegger proclaims the death of God. However, with this expression he does not want to assert an ordinary atheism. Rather, he intends to say that "the supersensible world, especially the world of the Christian God, has lost its effective force in history." See "The Rectorate 1933/34," 18.

to be thought is too great.”<sup>69</sup> Like Being, which he describes as “disclosing self-concealing,” after making a disclosure Heidegger withdraws; after stirring up a revolution, he leaves all its problems to others. He says “only a God can still save us,” but the God for whom, in the absence of philosophical thought, he now looks is clearly not that of the Christians or of any contemporary religion.<sup>70</sup>

Heidegger tells us that in order to begin anew we need to go to the “age-old,” that is, pre-classical and pre-metaphysical traditions of thought. He invokes the concept of the ancient *polis*. On the other hand, he does not want to concern himself with the question of ethics beyond saying that the word “*ethics* appeared for the first time in the school of Plato,”<sup>71</sup> thus implying that all ethics does not think the truth of Being and is nihilistic. Consequently, he does not consider the fact that even in pre-Platonic and pre-Socratic times a Greek *polis* was an ethical community, in which moral questions were raised and discussed.<sup>72</sup> The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Homer, the poems of Hesiod and the tragedies of Sophocles, as well as the other ancient Greek texts, including the monumental political work of Thucydides, the *History of the Peloponnesian War*, express concerns with ethical behavior on both individual and community levels.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, the strength of Western civilization, insofar its roots can be traced to ancient Greece, is that from its beginning it was based on rationality, understood as free debate, and the affirmation of fundamental moral values. Whenever it turned to irrationality and moral relativism, as in Communism and Nazism, that civilization was in decline. Therefore, Heidegger is mistaken in his diagnosis of the ills of the contemporary society, and

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<sup>69</sup> See “*Spiegel* Interview,” 56–7 and 66.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>71</sup> Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 269.

<sup>72</sup> Beginning with the Homeric epics, ancient Greek literature dealt with such important questions as the relationship between individual and community, the importance of justice in the governance of the state, the distinction between offensive and defensive wars, and the danger of insolent or hubristic individual behavior. Ethics was an integral part of ancient Greek society and analysis of an individual character was commonplace in ancient Greece long before Plato. For an excellent discussion of early Greek ethics, see Mary Frances Williams, *Ethics in Thucydides: The Ancient Simplicity* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1998).

<sup>73</sup> Following Nietzsche, Heidegger conceals these ethical concerns in his translations and interpretations of ancient texts. For example, see his translation of the first chorus from Sophocles’ *Antigone*, in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, chapter 4.

his solution to those ills is also wrong. Asking the question of Being (and, drawing our attention to this question is his significant contribution) is an important addition to, but can never replace, asking moral questions in the spirit of rationality and freedom.<sup>74</sup>

## VII

*Thinking Beyond Heidegger.* Modernity is for Heidegger an age that is marked by an ongoing ideological struggle for global domination. By asking the question of the meaning of Being, he attempts to show the limitations of the modern project, linking it with the metaphysical tradition of the West and its nihilism. Translated into political terms, this means that he could not support Nazism that he regarded as one of modern ideologies, along with Americanism and Communism. His post-metaphysical thinking, which he develops especially after the “turn,” is critical of all ideological perspectives. And yet, as I have tried to show, Heidegger is politically an ambiguous figure and the post-modernism that he initiates, whose subject is theory as well as action, is still embedded in the unfinished project of modernity.

A general tendency of thinking is that it slips into metaphysics. Post-modern thinking is not free from that tendency either. It solidifies into a new ideology. A post-Heideggerian philosophy must be one that considers limitations of his thought, and of the post-modern thinking that he initiated. Such a thinking asks the Heideggerian question of Being, but it also comes back to the fundamental question of “What is right?” that he disregarded.

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<sup>74</sup>The fact that Heidegger did not appreciate the significance of the question of ethics led him to make such an unfortunate statement as: “Agriculture is now a motorized food industry; in its essence it is the same thing as the manufacture of corpses in gas chambers, the same as blockades and the reduction of a region to hunger, the same as the manufacture of hydrogen bombs.” By being unable to draw basic moral distinctions on the basis of his philosophy, and thus by making a statement like this, in which he equated mechanized agriculture with death in gas chambers, he displayed a serious drawback of his thought, and his personal political naiveté and moral insensitivity. Cited after Karsten Harries, introduction to *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism*, xxx.